

Oral history and archiving memories in south africa

[History](#)



Oral history is the capturing of people's experiences using audio and videotapes. It attempts to fill in gaps of recorded history.

During the capturing of this history, people such as apartheid activists whose side of events have not been documented are interviewed and asked questions regarding their involvement in the struggle.

The uniqueness of this kind of history is that you get to interact with people who observed past events and whose memories and perceptions of these are to be preserved as oral record for future generations. Oral history does not only help with recording people's memories, it also helps to identify, appreciate and respect different aspects of heritage. This includes people, events and experiences that have shaped our lives, communities and our national identity in different ways.

Oral history allows you to learn more about individuals who might not appear in the popular history, because not everything that happened in the past was recorded, it gives people the opportunity to tell their own story in their own words. It also allows the interviewer to ask questions that he/she is interested in covering as there are no structured questions.

Currently the South African History Archive (SAHA) is busy with the Land Act Project, where oral history plays a major role in collecting information about places that were affected by this Act.

In line with the mandate to recapture lost and neglected history, SAHA interviewed people from Mogopa, Driefontein and Braklaagte, which are the communities affected by forced removals. Images that were taken by Gille

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de Vlieg in the early 80s, were taken back to the communities, before interviews were conducted people were shown these images as a way to help them remember. After the interviews were done they were taken back to the archive to be transcribed, along with images taken during the visit to these communities, to show their current way of living in a democratic South Africa.

Catherine Thandi Madlala, 11 June 2013. Nelson Dlamini Oral histories are taken back to the archive so that they can be preserved for future generation, and also after the data is being compiled, a report will be published and taken back to the community so that they can also be able to access it rather than having to visit the archive every now and then. SAHA uses oral history as a tool in order to live up to their mandate, and also it helps communities like Tembisa which SAHA also played a vital role into making their history to be known by people.

Through oral history, you can learn about hopes, beliefs, aspirations, family histories, personal experiences and disappointments. It also brings both researchers and participants together, as they get to engage in conversation and help people work through traumatic experiences simply by listening to them. Even though oral history remains a contentious topic it should be viewed as an alternative way to record history.